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AN UNUSUAL GROUP OF MOUNDS IN NORTH DAKOTA

By GEORGE F. WILL

DURING the summer of 1920 a new group of mounds was reported to the North Dakota Historical Society. It was recently examined by Dr. Gilmore of that organization and the writer.

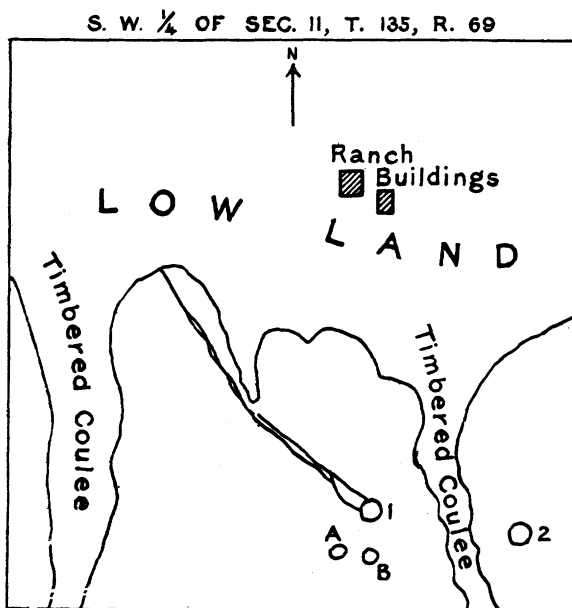


FIG. 27.—Quarter-section S. E. of Streeter N. Dak., showing group of mounds. Scale 880 ft. to 1 inch.

These mounds are located about twelve miles south and east of Streeter, N. D., on the southwest quarter of section 11, township 135, range 69. Similar mounds have been reported from the James and Sheyenne River valleys, but so far none of them have been described. These mounds also bear a resemblance to mounds south of Bismarck, N. D., near Apple Creek,¹ which were described in a paper for the *Anthropologist* some years ago.

¹ *American Anthropologist* (n. s.), vol. 13, no. 4 (Oct.-Dec., 1911), pp. 585-588.

The location of the mounds is in a rather beautiful and unusual spot for this part of North Dakota. They are placed in the very heart of the Coteau du Missouri on the top of a promontory jutting out from the highest range of hills in the region. This promontory is cut off both to the east and west by deep, timbered draws or coulees containing numerous large and very fine springs. We were told that this area hereabouts contained the only timbered coulees to be found for a great distance in any direction, a fact which doubtless has strong bearing on the location here of the various features to be mentioned.



FIG. 28.—View to north from top of mound 1.

A rough map of the site is presented herewith (fig. 27) and the various features will be taken up in detail, references being made to the map and photographs. A general view looking north from mound 1 gives an idea of the height and wide outlook from the top of the promontory, and shows part of the timbered coulee along the east and north (fig. 28).

Mound 1, as the most important feature of the group, will be taken up first. The map shows its location on the nearly flat top of the promontory which slopes gently to the northern edge where it breaks abruptly into steep bluffs cut by deep washes. This mound is about forty feet in diameter with a height of from eight to nine feet at its center. Running a trifle west of northwest from it is a plainly marked, wide approach with a very gradual descent. This can be clearly seen in the view looking south toward the mound where the approach shows on the right-hand side. This

ridge extends very clearly for about two hundred feet. The width is about twenty-four feet at the base of the mound and gradually narrows as it recedes. From a point two hundred feet from the



FIG. 29.—Mound 1, from the north.

mound it runs as a narrow, rather indistinct, but continuous ridge, with a slight bend at the head of a draw nearly an eighth of a mile to the bluff edge as the map shows. The direction from the mound is just about that of the setting sun at its farthest north point in June.

This mound had been partially excavated by the parties who had reported it. A round hole about seven feet across and six feet deep

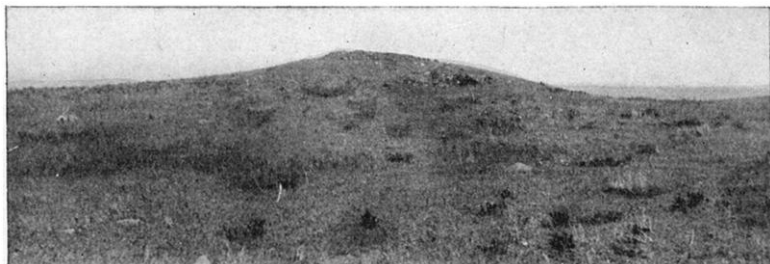


FIG. 30.—Mound 1, from the south.

had been dug at the center of the top. At a depth of five feet they stated that they had found the skeleton of a child which they believed to be about seven years old. The bones were somewhat mixed up, with many of them missing. They were inspected and seemed to be in a fair state of preservation although they were reported as very soft and crumbling when taken out.

Most of this mound is composed of the gravelly soil of the vicinity but there are a number of pockets and layers of wood ashes and also pockets of bone fragments with whole small bones, some of birds but mostly of buffalo. No depression showed in the vicinity from which the dirt of the mound might have been taken, so it seems probable that the earth was carried some distance. Pictures of the mound are shown from both the north and south, giving a good idea of its shape and of the approach (figs. 29 and 30). A good many flint chips were found in the mound, but no other artifacts.

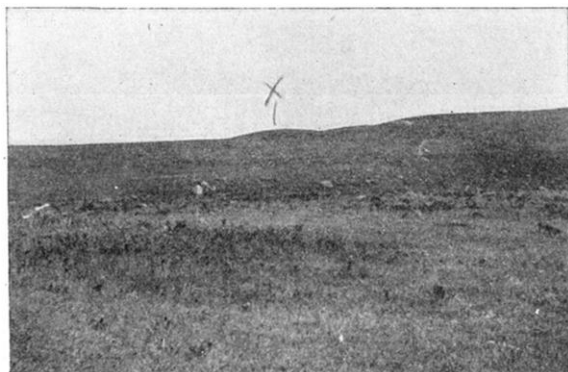


FIG. 31.—Mound 2, marked with a cross.

Across the deep coulee to the east from the first mound is another large mound, mound 2, as shown on the map. A picture of it is also shown, the picture being taken from the top of mound 1 (fig. 31). Mound 2 has never been disturbed by excavation. It is nearly circular, with no approach, and has a diameter of about sixty feet, with a maximum height of seven to eight feet at the center.

A short distance south of mound 1 are two low mounds marked *A* and *B* on the map. These are about two and one half feet high at the highest points, with a diameter of forty feet for mound *B*, *A* being slightly smaller. They are hardly distinguishable in the photograph looking south from mound 1 (fig. 32); neither has been disturbed.

In addition to these clear features the ground over the whole

promontory seems to show signs of more or less disturbance long ago, with a number of very indistinct rings from twenty to thirty feet in diameter and with one almost rectangular shallow depression some distance to the north of mound 1. The ground has not been plowed or disturbed in any manner within recent years.

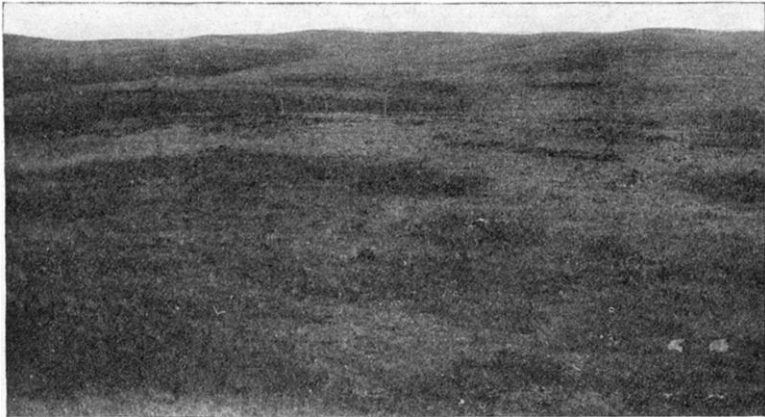


FIG. 32.—View to south from top of mound 1.

The fact that the location of this site is unique in the matter of the presence of both timber and water, which are to be found nowhere else together for a great distance in any direction, serves to connect it in the mind with the tradition of a Cheyenne Indian village temporarily established in the hills of the Coteau du Plateau du Missouri not far west of the present town of Kulm, N. D. This site is some eighteen or twenty miles northwest of Kulm, and the only location where timber is to be found. The only drawback to the theory that this might be the Cheyenne site is the absence, so far as observed, of potsherds. As has been said, flint chips and flakes were found in the excavation of the mound, but absolutely no potsherds. The excavation for the whole site has, however, so far been very slight and more careful investigations might easily show pottery fragments. In any event it might be well to consider that suitable pottery clay is hardly to be found in this region, and such articles of pottery as the people may have been able to carry in their flight from farther east would have been used with extreme care.